MARVEL TALES
#183
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FLASHBACK 2: HUMAN TORCH

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KING OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR

by JAMES VAN HISE

What does one think of when the Fantastic Four is mentioned? Almost always the first thing mentioned will be Jack Kirby's art as his art was responsible for giving the strip artistic depth and making the characters of the strange band come alive.

But before I get into a cross section of Kirby's work on Fantastic Four, I'd like to mention something which points out just how responsible Kirby was for making the FANTASTIC FOUR the comic that it was under him.

The following quote is taken from an interview with Jack Kirby performed by Bruce Hamilton shortly after Kirby left Marvel to work at D.C.

Bruce: "Was the concept of the Fantastic Four your idea or Stan Lee's?"

Jack: "IT WAS MY IDEA. IT WAS MY IDEA TO DO IT THE WAY IT WAS; MY IDEA TO DEVELOP IT THE WAY IT WAS. I'M NOT SAYING THAT STAN LEE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. OF COURSE HE DID. WE TALKED THINGS OUT. AS THINGS WENT ON, I BEGAN TO WORK AT HOME AND I NO LONGER CAME UP TO THE OFFICE. I DEVELOPED ALL THE STUFF AT HOME AND JUST SENT IT IN. I HAD TO COME UP WITH NEW IDEAS TO HELP THE STRIP SELL. I WAS FACED WITH THE FRUSTRATION OF HAVING TO COME UP WITH NEW IDEAS AND THEN HAVING THEM TAKEN FROM ME. SO, I WAS CAUGHT IN A BOX AND I HAD TO GET OUT OF THAT BOX, AND WHEN D.C. CAME ALONG AND GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT, I TOOK IT."

Provides more than just a little food for thought doesn't it? This could explain why the F.F. seemed to be losing steam the last few issues Kirby did due to his building frustration over unacknowledged creativity, and why the strip plummeted even further in that area when he left it.

But rather than talking about the F.F. at the end of the Kirby cycle, let's step back a decade or so to the time when the F.F. first began.

It was late in the summer of 1961. It had been a few years since Marvel had had any super-heroes, but with the growing success of D.C.'s revivals of Green Lantern and the Flash as well as their other new additions, Marvel began to look toward the super-hero once again...but with a difference that would revolutionize the industry's concepts of the comic book hero.

The first issue introduced four super-powered characters who, although being super-heroes, wore no special costumes, dressing in nondescript street clothes. The art was good but somewhat crude compared to what Kirby would do within just a couple years. And

yet the art was perfect for that first issue as Marvel was still staying close to their staple of that time, monsters, and the art thus gave the strip the atmosphere necessary for that kind of story to work. Examples of this different early approach was that the Thing was much more brutish and horrific looking; even as Ben Grimm his features were coarse, not at all like the handsome Ben Grimm that would appear time and again in later issues when for different reasons he would regain his normal, human form. Also in that first issue, when the F.F. met the Mole Man, they journeyed to "Monster Isle" to seek him out and rather than the mindless subterraneans of later issues, his lackeys were a horde of monsters, one especially being a tremendous giant creature. The second issue continued much the same, except that the monsters came in the form of the hideous Skrulls from out space who at one point turned into different creatures to battle them, including a giant snake and a spiked robot. Issue two introduced the feature that would set the F.F. definitely apart from the standard super-heores up until that time. They had personalities!

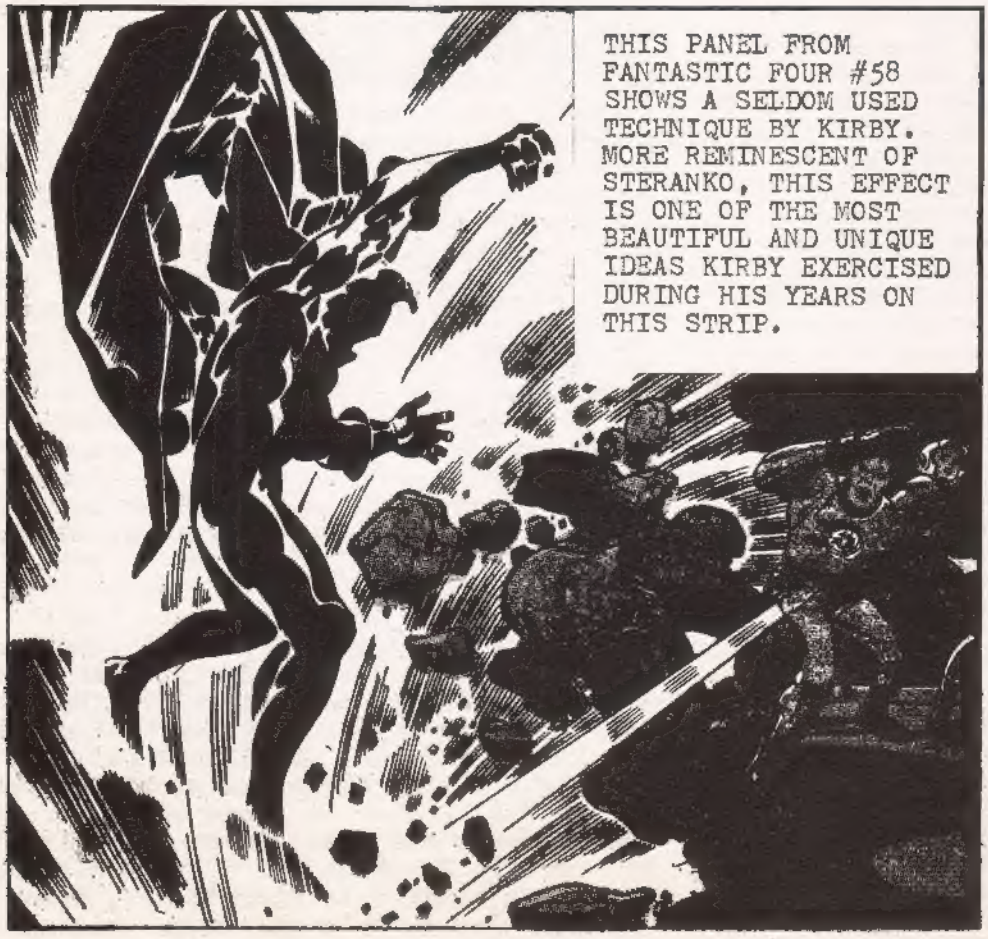
The Thing resented the way he was and usually was quite hostile, especially toward the Torch, making threats that were thinly veiled at best. This made them the complete antithesis of the Justice League of America, being anything but a closely knit group that operated like a well oiled machine.

THE THING by Kirby - 1961

Issue three emphasized this even further when the Thing's jealous outburst over the Torch's defeat of the Miracle Man caused the Torch to walk out on the group entirely, the story ending on the ominous note that they had reason to fear that the Torch might turn his powers against <u>them</u>! Issue three continued the use of monsters with a giant statue of an alien creature which supposedly came to life and menaced the city. In issue #4 this approach was toned down somewhat as the giant whale that appears doesn't play that large a role, although the sequence of the Thing walking through the inside of the Whale-thing's body is in this genre even to the Thing fighting a monster during his journey. By this time, despite the personality clashes, the F.F. had become to resemble super-heroes more as issue three had introduced them in dark blue costumes, costumes which would change very little in the years to come. Issue four played down the Torch's quitting of the group and instead used it as a device for Johnny Storm to come upon the amnesiac Sub-Mariner in a bowery flophouse. I'm sure most fans are aware of that story by now. This was the first revival of an original Golden Age character that Marvel did in the sixties. This was obviously Marvel going DC one better. DC revived the names of the Flash and Green Lantern on new characters, so Marvel, after doing the same with the Human Torch, went & revived the <u>original</u> Sub-Mariner. The fact that he was a villain, or in actuality the first hero-villain or anti-hero due to his hatred of the human race for the destruction of his people from an Atom Bomb test, made his revival that much more meaningful as it continued the tradition of characters with personal problems established by the Fantastic Four. By issue four, Kirby's art was becoming much more appealing, looking much sleeker and much less like the gothic approach he had used for so long in the monster titles. Issue five introduced the villain which was a sheer inspiration, Doctor Doom. The fact that Dr. Doom is still Marvel's most popular villain, evidences the creativity present in his creation. Over the next few issues Kirby's art remained relatively unchanged in appearance, no noticable strides or changes in technique occuring whatsoever. The stories maintained a high level of interest with new characters being introduced all the time, the Watcher (F.F. #13) being the most notable. The characters of the F.F. were undergoing a subtle change though. While a certain amount of inner conflict remained, the character of the Thing changed from the pitiable malcontent to the wise cracking and only occasionally morose personality that fans are familiar with today. The skirmishes between the Thing and the Torch became an advanced form of banter, played in a humorous vein as opposed to the serious personality clashes of the very early stories. What had not yet changed was the Sub-Mariner's relationship with Sue storm. In these earlier issues, a definite romantic interest was shown on Namor's part toward sue. One thing which changed in Kirby's art by issue twenty was his approach in drawing the Thing. No longer was Ben Grimm the hulking monster of the first three issues, his appearance gradually changing until by issue twenty he was pretty much as he looks today. Although his art style remained the same, Kirby first began his use of full and double page speads in Marvel during this period. His first real use of this in an impressive manner was in the first F.F. annual in the summer of 1963 in the thirty-seven page epic of "The Sub-Mariner Versus The Human Race". The only art of this period up to #20 which was any real departure was issue #13 which was inked by Steve Ditko. This was the only F.F. story Ditko inked and he did a truly superb job as his inking added a distinctly eerie atmosphere to the story of the F.F.'s journey to the mysterious blue area of the moon. If I had to pick one, this would be the best issue of the first twenty. Issue #21 began a period of rather mediocre art which would last for six issues. These were the issues which were inked by George Bell (real name Jack Abel). It was not Kirby's fault that the art looked so bad, it's just that Abel is a very crude inker, adding nothing to the art he inks and detracting quite a bit. His inking style was sloppy and made over use of blacks to block out much of the linework and sweep which lent Kirby's art power. By issue #27 he seemed to be adjusting himself to Kirby's art, doing a better job on this one issue than on

the previous six combined. With #28 the inking went to Chic Stone and once more the art had the polished verve that had marked Kirby's art in earlier issues. By issue #29 you could see that Kirby's art style had changed slightly, but this was mostly due to the new inker for as of yet no real artistic innovations had occured. What did occur which didn't really have anything to do with Kirby's style was that in #29 Kirby used a photograph as a background in a panel. On issue #33 he used a photo again but this time on the cover. The idea of using this on a cover was never repeated though so it seems safe to assume that it wasn't commercially successful. The characters of the F.F.changed little during this time, the only change being that Sue Storm had increased her powers in #22 and the love affair with Namor just faded out without any mention either way. In fact, when Sue and Reed were wed in the third annual, Namor was not involved at all, there apparantly being no feelings on his part that needed any mention at all.

But still no artistic innovations had occured. Issue #37 used a photo again, and very effectively too as the background of a full page scene of the F.F.'s ship going through outer space. Issue #39 used a device on the cover which Kirby only made occasional use of, that being a symbolic representation, in this case the mammoth figure of Doctor Doom, dwarfing the entire city in a menacing pose. Kirby liked doing this type of approach with Doctor Doom, using it again on the cover of #86. Storywise the adventures had taken new directions such as going to the Skrull planet itself and in #39 & 40 a story in which the F.F. had lost their powers and were led into battle against Doctor Doom by Daredevil. This is an especially well done adventure and shows the tremendous storytelling capabilities of Kirby, especially in the climax. This is when the Thing is forcably changed from the normal Ben Grimm to his monster form due to the towering threat of Doctor Doom. This sequence is masterfully handled as the Thing directs his rage at Dr. Doom, overcoming tremendously powerful weapons, fighting against impossible odds to finally get at Doom himself, ripping at his armor and severely injuring Doom's hands before Reed Richards ends it with an incredibly absurd reason for letting Dr. Doom get away scott free. Issues #40-43 were somewhat of a letdown artwise due to the too often bland inking of Colletta. But with #44 all the stops were pulled out with the addition of Joe Sinnott as inker. As Kirby mentioned in the interview excerpt, he had to constantly come up with ideas and this was especially evident with #44 for who but Kirby could have conceived the Inhumans? This issue especially Kirby all the way for to lend it epic-like proportions (something that is synominous with Kirby), Dragon Man was thrown in to wreck havoc as well. This story spanned four and a half issues and dwarfed anything Kirby's done for DC due



THIS PANEL FROM FANTASTIC FOUR #58 SHOWS A SELDOM USED TECHNIQUE BY KIRBY. MORE REMINESCENT OF STERANKO, THIS EFFECT IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE IDEAS KIRBY EXERCISED DURING HIS YEARS ON THIS STRIP.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF KIRBY'S USE OF SYMBOLISM ON COVERS, SOMETHING HE USED RARELY AND MOSTLY WITH DOCTOR DOOM WHEN HE DID MAKE USE OF IT.

SOME TIME LATER, AS A DEEPLY ENGROSSED, ORANGE-SKINNED LITERATURE LOVER PURSUES HIS RELENTLESS QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE--
I WONDER IF THERE REALLY ARE SUCH THINGS AS HAUNTED HOUSES?
PROBABLY NOT, OR STRETCHO WOULD'A CONNED ME INTO SPENDIN' A NIGHT IN ONE BY NOW!
GHOST STORIES
YOU DON'T CATCH A SOPHISTICATED GUY LIKE ME GITTIN' HUNG UP WITH--WITH--
I DON'T REMEMBER NUTHIN' ON MY SHOULDER--WHEN I--STARTED READIN'--!
WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU, BIG FELLA?
I'VE NEVER KNOWN YOU TO BE SO JUMPY BEFORE!
ANYWAY, IT REALLY IS YOU! THEN--YOU AIN'T--I MEAN--EH-EHEEEEH!
WHO'S JUMPY! I WUZ JUST PRACTICIN' MY ISOMETRIC ANAIC LESSONS!
ANYWAY, YA SHOULDN'T OUGHTTA SNEAK UP ON A GUY THAT WAY! IT AIN'T COUTH!

THESE HIGHLIGHTS FROM A HUMOROUS INTERLUDE IN FANTASTIC FOUR #58 DEMONSTRATE THE CLEVERNESS EMPLOYED IN CLICHE' SITUATIONS DURING KIRBY'S REIGN ON THE F.F. THIS IS NOT TO IMPLY THAT STAN LEE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, BUT NOTHING AS WELL DONE AS THIS HAS APPEARED IN FANTASTIC FOUR SINCE KIRBY'S DEPARTURE FROM THE MAGAZINE.

the very interesting characters and the concepts that were utilized here. For instance, each one of the inhumans was a carefully thought out personage, replete with individual costume, powers, etc. For more unique and exciting than any of the New Gods. But in Fantastic Four, Jack Kirby's onslaught of ideas had only begun to get warmed up with the first Inhumans saga. Issue #48-50 introduced Galactus, the planet eater who became one of Marvel Comics most unique and popular villains due to the cosmic scope of his menace. But what was even more important about these three issues was the introduction of the Silver Surfer! This character was so original that the interest in him quickly overshadowed Galactus until the Surfer made numerous gueat appearances in other books and finally gaining his own title, shortlived as it was. Of all the characters Kirby introduced in the FANTASTIC FOUR, the Surfer had to be the most popular. Following the Surfer, the next major character to be introduced was the Black Panther, the black sovereign of an African kingdom, possessing wealth, superscience and super powers; again he was a very detailed character, The fact that he was black was a very good stroke, but it was not played up in a "look what we did" fashion, rather his being black was the least of the many facets of the character. But the Surfer was still more popular. It's interesting to note that shortly after the Silver Surfer's first appearance his sleek silver body was changed slightly so that it appeared he was wearing some sort of pants about his loins. This is because his original appearance as being an apparntly naked silver being made some people uncomfortable. Ridiculous but true nonetheless.

But these characters are only one facet of the creativity Kirby displayed in this comic. He also exercised it in the characters of the F.F. themselves (now there's a novel thought). Primarily though this was imparted in the Thing so that his character always seemed to have more scope than any of the others. It was the Thing who was humorous and yet plagued with the tragedy of his monstrous form. Loved by people and yet feared by them at the same time. He was a man who loved, and who was loved, by a blind girl. Can this many interesting facets be pointed out for even the rest of the F.F. combined?

There are probably those who don't believe Kirby's claims to being as responsible for ideas that went into the F.F. as he was, but just a close examination will point out things which are distinctly Kirby in execution. Kirby's methods are even more clear now that he has done so much for D.C. since many felt that his D.C. stories could barely be told from the work he did at Marvel due to the many similarities! Forinstance, in F.F. #54 is the appearance of Prester John. This is the only issue he appeared in but much is made of him in this story, a segment even being devoted to his history. This is very distinctly a Kirby approach. Another example is the characters as they are currently portrayed in the F.F. They do not have the depth of interest that they attained under Kirby, in fact their handling is like a bad imitation of Kirby's, using rehashings of situations so that it is more of the Stan Lee type soap opera. Even the recent reappearance of Galactus was just a rehash of the story that appeared in F.F. #'s 48-50 (and which amusingly enough was being reprinted at the same time as the recent reworking.).

But to return to Kirby's art, it had taken great strides during this period of inventiveness, Joe Sinnott's inking meshing with it perfectly as Kirby reworked old methods in his style and employed new ones. Page eleven of issue 57 has a full page drawing of a machinery studded laboratory, the type Kirby had used before and also the type that Steranko would use with relish later in his Shild strips with

approaches and layouts that would be strikingly similar. This same issue sports a cover which makes use of Kirby's favorite working of symbolism into a Doctor Doom cover (a practice he began with #10). By this time Kirby's use of crackling energy and explosions had become even more refined and added to the excitement generated by the art. Kirby used this in good stead in stories involving Doctor Doom stealing the Silver Surfer's powers, the Inhumans breaking free of the negative zone surrounding their city, journeys into a very different Negative Zone discovered by Reed Richards, as well as encounters with the Kree. But as well as he had done up until then, his art did not advance any further than what it had attained stylistically by issue #50, remaining at a high level but yet striking out in no new directions or doing any further work on polishing of style. In fact, in this last respect it became in many ways cliche'-ish. For example, page eight of issue 64 has a full page drawing of the Sentry in the stock Kirby position (palms forward, legs in a stance, etc) which has been imitated by every up and coming fan artist that ever freaked over a Kirby drawing. So unfortunately it is at this level

I HAD INTENDED TO WIPE YOU FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH--BUT NOW, I HAVE CONCEIVED A STILL GREATER REVENGE!
YOU--WHO HAVE NEVER BEFORE BEEN VANQUISHED--SHALL LIVE OUT THE REST OF YOUR DAYS IN ABJECT HELPLESSNESS...NEVER KNOWING WHEN I SHALL SNUFF OUT YOUR WORTHLESS LIVES AT A WHIM!
THERE CAN BE NO GREATER PUNISHMENT FOR YOU THAN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU

THIS IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A STOCK KIRBY POSE. NOTE THE ONE ARM BACK AND UP RAISED WHILE THE OTHER IS FORWARD WITH FINGERS STRETCHED AND PALM FACING OUT. THIS POSITION CAN BE FOUND OFTEN IN KIRBY STORIES. THE PARTICULAR ISSUE THIS PANEL IS FROM HAD IT TWICE, JUST WITH THE FIGURE OF DOCTOR DOOM.

that Kirby's art remained. But this most certainly did not prevent him from providing some very enjoyable experiences with it. For despite no new techniques, he did a lot of reworking with what he had, providing an almost endless array of futuristic buildings and machinery. Kirby's knack for spacial scenes was used to beautiful ends in #74 when Galactus returned to earth. This issue is especially nice, page 14 & 15 having galactic scenes and an exquisite full page drawing of Galactus. The art on these particular two pages are perfect examples of the reason for Kirby's popularity. They evoke a sense of wonder. Kirby has the knack for this while many artists of superior drawing talent than Kirby do not. This is what most fans of comic art are searching for, the sense of wonder. What makes this so sought after and hard to find is that it is so much harder to attain today than it was twenty and thirty years ago when what is commonplace today (space travel, etc) would evoke a sense of wonder then. There are many very good artists around today but few of them are capable of achieving the sense of wonder in their art. Kirby's ability to do this places him in the class with artists otherwise more talented than him, artists such as Wally Wood & Al Williamson. This is Kirby's mystique; his art isn't beautiful as much as it is powerful. It is powerful with the sense of wonder and it is powerful due to Kirby's graphic story techniques. One of these techniques is the extreme closeup of the face when a

YOU DARE SPEAK SO TO ME,?!
YOU SHALL WHISTLE A DIFFERENT TUNE WHEN I RETURN TO DESTROY YOU--AFTER I HAVE REDUCED THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO WHIMPERING HELPLESSNESS!

particularly dramatic line of dialogue is being delivered. This method endows the scene with a sense of immediacy, of now. It gives the sequence power and strength by utilizing the cinematic capabilities of comic art to their fullest. This is where Steranko got his story-telling technique but he advanced it further still, extrapolating on ideas utilized by his idol Jack Kirby. This is what made Kirby's era on Fantastic Four so effective, his constant use of different ideas, molding and sometimes advancing, his basic style to fit the patterns of thought he injected into the strip. For Kirby's art is a drawing of motion, of things happening on a cosmic scale and events which were almost always of epic proportions. Kirby made the Fantastic Four. His drawings shaped them into startlingly vivid perspectives, vitalizing the strip in vistas that perhaps no one else would have made as convincing and exciting. What other artist's pen and fertile imagination has given birth to as many ideas and characters as peopled the first hundred issues of FANTASTIC FOUR? His responsibility for what did come to pass in those issues is evidenced just by the barrenness of those issues since his departure. Can there really be any question that Jack Kirby was the true essense of the Fantastic Four?

Fans of the Fantastic Four will find much useful information in the MARVEL COLLECTORS HANDBOOK which contains a detailed index to every issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR as well as being enhanced with related art. It is available from the SFCA for $1.25.

THE LEGEND OF PRESTER JOHN

IN THE DAYS OF THE OLD CRUSADES EPISODE I

IN THE MAIN HALL OF THE MASTER TEMPLAR'S CASTLE, CLOSE TO THE BATTLEMENTS OF JERUSALEM, A DISPUTE ARISES.

SO YOU DONATED SARACEN GOLD TO THE GERMANIC ORDER OF KNIGHTS AND REFUSE US OUR TITHE? WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

YOU SHOULD KNOW THE CAUSE. YOUR COFFERS ARE FULL TO OVER BRIMMING, YOUR WINE CELLAR IS OVERSTOCKED, AND YOUR WHORES ARE NUMBERLESS. THE POPE SHALL HEAR OF IT!

I DRINK TO YOU, SIR JOHN. YOUR DEVOTION TO FAITH SHALL WIN YOU DEATH

GUARDS! TO THE DUNGEON WITH HIM!

YOU HERETIC DOGS!

THE NIGHT WAS CLEAR AS CRYSTAL. OUTSIDE THE DUNGEON A GUARD KEPT WATCH.

WHAT ARE YOU CHILDREN DOING WITH THESE? IT'S FAR TOO LATE FOR YOU TO BE OUTSIDE.. LEAVE THESE BAGS HERE.

BY ALL THAT'S HOLY!

SORCERY... BLACK MAGIC... GUNPOWDER TO THE WISE ...

THE UNWORLDLY WORK OF THE DEVIL TO THE IGNORANT.

GAEN, SIR JOHN'S SQUIRE, RIDES UP BOLDLY AFTER THE EXPLOSION.

GRAB HOLD, SIR JOHN, THEY'LL BE AFTER US SOON.

I TAUGHT YE WELL, LAD, BUT DID YE HAVE TO USE SO MUCH BLACK POWDER? LET'S GATHER OUR BELONGINGS AND LEAVE THIS CITY!

THREE HOURS RIDE FROM THE CITY, SIR JOHN AND GAEN ARE PURSUED.

TWO RIDERS FOUND A SHORT CUT. WE MUST MAKE A STAND.

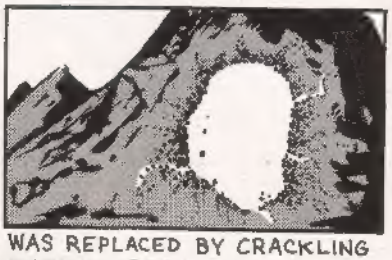
THERE'S A GOOD POSITION OVER HERE!

SEND THEIR SOULS TO HELL, GAEN, OR OUR FUTURE GOES NO FURTHER THAN TODAY!

THE MASTER WANTS YOUR HEAD TODAY, SIR JOHN! EITHER YOURS OR OURS.

THEN LET HIM FIGHT THE VULTURES FOR *YOURS!*

WHEN THE FIERCE BATTLE HAD ENDED, OVERWHELMING SILENCE

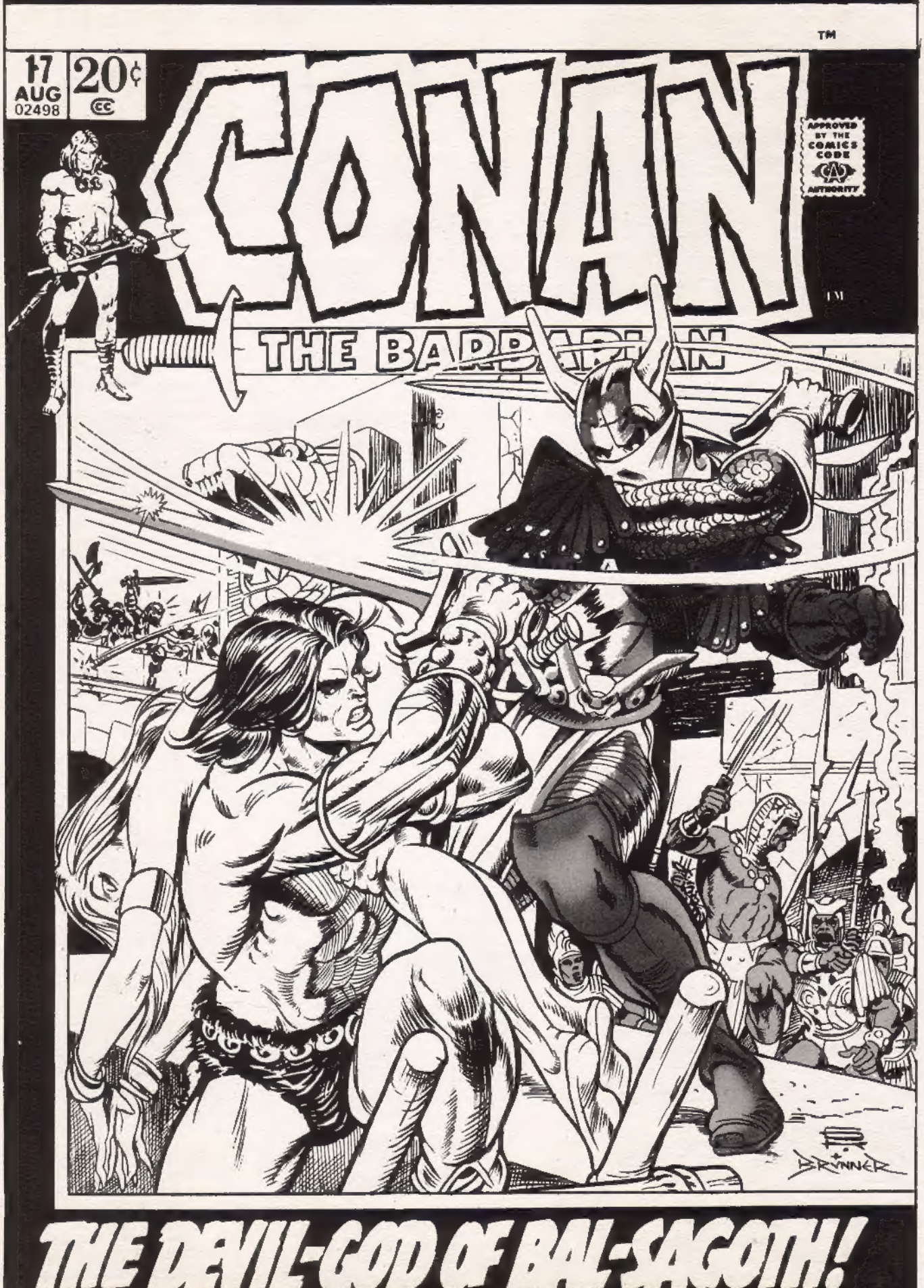


WAS REPLACED BY CRACKLING ENERGY. THE WIZARD, CHA!

SIR JOHN, YOU HAVE ENDED OBLIGATIONS TO ONE CAUSE SO I ASK YOU TO HONOR THE PROMISE YOU MADE ME LONG AGO. THERE IS AN EVIL IN THE LAND BEYOND COMPREHENSION. YOU MUST COME TO MY LAND TO PREPARE FOR COMBAT AGAINST IT. WE INSURE THAT YOU WILL ARRIVE, BUT BE CAUTIOUSSSS...

MOUNT UP, GAEN. WE HAVE A GREAT JOURNEY AHEAD, AND LORD KNOWS HOW MANY MONSTERS OR DEMONS WAIT THERE.

NEXT: THE DRAGONS OF BABYLON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CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
THE DEVIL-GOD OF BAL-SAGOTH!

THE WATCHER SPEAKS

BY Orlando Falcon

IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT MARVEL COMICS, SEND IT TO:
ORLANDO FALCON
190 S.E. 7th AVENUE
HIALEAH, FLORIDA 33010

Q. 1. I AM A DOCTOR STRANGE COMPLETIST FROM WAY BACK, AND WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU COULD SUPPLY ME WITH A LIST OF THE COMICS IN WHICH THE GOOD DOCTOR APPEARED IN AFTER BEING DISCONTINUED IN DOCTOR STRANGE #183.

Bob Boyar, Corte Madera, California

A. The Lord of Necromancy, along with the Silver Surfer and a few other Marvel-superheroes have been typewritten into the character of "loners", and though they may have several supporting characters strengthening them in their strips, these "lone-heroes" tend to shy away from other superheroes to some extent. Since his cancellation in DR. STRANGE #183 (November 1969), Stephen Sanders has made only three guest appearances in any Marvel magazines outside of his recent revival in MARVEL FEATURE #1 (December 1971). and they are:

"The Monarch and the Mystic!" SUB-MARINER #22 (February 1970)
"...Where Stalks the Night Crawler!" HULK #126 (April 1970)
"Enter: Dr. Strange!" SPIDER-MAN #109 (June 1972)

For more adventures with Dr. Strange, keep an eye out for the DEFENDERS and for Dr. Strange in his own strip in MARVEL PREMIERE.

Q. 2. DURING EITHER THE LATE PART OF THE 50's OR THE VERY EARLY 60's, MARVEL PUBLISHED IN ONE OF ITS MANY "MONSTER" TITLES A STORY ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE HULK; I KNOW THIS FOR A FACT, BUT I CAN'T SEE WHY THE "GREEN GIANT" WAS INTRODUCED IN THAT WAY, AND THAT FAR BACK IN THE MARVEL AGE. COULD YOU PLEASE SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS SUBJECT?

J.V. Harrison, Coconut Grove, Florida

A. During Marvel's (or rather Atlas') pre-superhero days it published, along with almost every other comics magazine company, an innumerable number of monster and "horror" comics that just filled the newstands. It was inevitable that sooner or later Atlas and Stan Lee would run across the name "Hulk" and use it in one of their monster titles. In November of 1960 with JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #62 the inevitable came to pass. That month's lead story featured "The Coming of the Hulk!", illustrated by Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers and written by Stan Lee. The story dealt with an escaped galactic criminal who wanted to wreak his havoc and vengeance throughout the universe. Of course, this wasn't the Dr. Bruce Banner who became the Incredible Hulk through a fluke accident with the explosion of a gamma bomb in the first issue of his own mag in May of 1962, but rather an alien monster come to destroy the earth and mankind. Xemnu, the original "Hulk's" name, was defeated and sent in a rocket to orbit the sun until the end of time. The Hulk's banishment lasted approximately three issues because "The Return of the Hulk!" came in JIM #66 and the world was plunged into dire peril once again. This time however, the Hulk's defeat was somewhat longer, seeing as he managed to make his comeback and menace the world 12 years later in the pages of MARVEL FEATURE #3 where he fought the Defenders under a different name in "A Titan Walks Among Us!" (June 1972). The original story in which "...the living Hulk" menaced the world,was reprinted in MONSTERS ON THE PROWL #11 and the "Return of the Hulk" was reprinted in MONSTERS ON THE PROWL #14. The two stories were reprinted exactly as they previosuly appeared except that everywhere that "Hulk" was written in the original story, it was edited to read titan (although if you read them over closely, in one of them overlooked a "hulk"), also the coloring of the original Hulk was also changed from that of a rusty-brown to a snow-white in the reprints.

Q. 3. IN ISSUE #132 OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THE F.F. LINE-UP BECAME: MR. FANTASTIC, THE THING, THE HUMAN TORCH AND MEDUSA. I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF THE LINE-UP IS GOING TO STAY AS SUCH OR IF THE INVISIBLE GIRL WILL ONCE AGAIN RETURN TO JOIN THE F.F.?

Richard Roder, Pine Plains, New York

A. There has been some talk at 575 Madison Avenue as to how long the Medusa, Richards, Thing, and Torch team will hold out before Roy Thomas comes in and puts Sue Richards and her son Franklin back where they belong; at the moment it's just speculation but they should be back with the rest of the F.F. by issue 136 or so. No matter what member quits, you can be rest assured that they <u>will</u> return shortly as this sequence of members of the F.F. quitting and coming back has been going on since the beginning of the F.F. itself.

Q. 4. WHO IS IT THAT DECIDES THE FATE OF ALL MARVEL CHARACTERS, AND HOW IS THIS PROCESS DONE?

Mike Echegary, Miami Springs, Florida

A. The "fate" of all Marvel characters is subject to their appeal and sales figures that they bring in. A character may be very popular with a certain age group as in the case of the Silver Surfer, but does not carry over with a lower age bracket of Marvel's readers. In a case such as this, the magazine may have a firm financial backing from one age group, but doesn't carry over to other age groups. In an instance such as this, the book is usually dropped, shelved, sold at a less frequent rate or given a "new look". Generall, when a book starts losing readers or begins to sag in quality, it receives this "new look" in which the hero suddenly gets a new costume, new and more super powers, and a new motive for existing. This is true of 8 out of 10 characters who find themselves in the predicament of having to go out and get new readers. Usually it's Martin Goodman who makes the final decision whether a character is going to be kept or sent to the "superhero-limbo", but the editor and Stan Lee are more or less the mediators. If they can work something out with the book and take it on a "new trend", the book and the character itself will stick around a little longer.

Q. 5. WHY IS IT THAT SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOES IS BEING PUBLISHED ON AN OFF AND ON PATTERN WITH NEW STORIES AND ART ONE ISSUE AND REPRINTS THE NEXT?

George Burke, Pierre, Arkansas

A. The one reason for this new and reprint material schtick Marvel is carrying on is its repid expansion into new and other fields of current interest. It has been said by certain newszines on various occasions that Marvel is expanding too fast for its own good. This may prove to be true as in the case of SGT. FURY and the howlers, there is not always time to write and draw a new story for the magazine; since there are enough back issues to reprint without any trouble, Marvel is taking the easy route out whenever it gets itself in a pinch, and reprints a "classic" every now and again.

Q. 6. I'VE HEARD SOME GOOD RUMORS THAT MARVEL IS PLANNING TO REVIVE THE SILVER SURFER IN HIS OWN MAGAZINE; ANY TRUTH TO THAT EFFECT?

Richard Roder, Pine Plains, New York

A. There has been plenty of talk and speculation to the point that one fanzine announced exactly when and what the contents of the new Silver Surfer mag would contain, but as of the present, there has been no definite facts or figures to be associated with a new Silver Surfer comic book. More than likely the Surfer will continue to make guest appearances in various Marvel comics and will eventually wind up a member of the Defenders, more or less in the same fashion as when he co-starred with the Hulk and the Sub-Mariner in "Titans Three" in SUB-MARINER #34 & 35.

Q. 7. I THINK THAT BARRY SMITH IS THE GREATEST ARTIST SINCE JACK KIRBY AND I WAS REALLY DEPRESSED WHEN HE STOPPED DOING CONAN. IS THERE ANY CHANCE HE'LL BE DOING ANY MORE WORK FOR MARVEL SOON, PERHAPS EVEN CONAN AGAIN?

Mark McKinney, King of Prussia, Pa.

A. Despite earlier reports to the contrary, Barry Smith will not only be doing more work for Marvel, but will be doing 20-25 pages of Conan for the revived SAVAGE TALES which will be published bi-monthly beginning this summer. It's pretty certain the Smith will be doing Conan for nearly every issue of the new SAVAGE TALES as, like the first, it will star Conan.

Q. 8. WHAT WAS THE ORDER IN WHICH THE MARVEL SUPERHEROES FIRST ENTERED INTO THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS?

Robert Lansing, DuMont, Arkansas

A. The first Marvel Age of Comics produced a fantastic and unique set of superheroes the likes of which will never be seen again. These heroes of the Marvel Age were (in order of their first appearances):

FANTASTIC FOUR	November 1961	FANTASTIC FOUR #1
SPIDER-MAN	December 1961	AMAZING FANTASY #15
ANT-MAN	January 1962	TALES TO ASTONISH #27
HULK	May 1962	INCREDIBLE HULK #1
THOR	August 1962	JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #83
IRON-MAN	March 1963	TALES OF SUSPENSE #39
SGT. FURY	MAY 1963	SGT. FURY #1
DR. STRANGE	July 1963	STRANGE TALES #110
AVENGERS	Sept. 1963	AVENGERS #1
X-MEN	Sept. 1963	X-MEN #1
DARE-DEVIL	April 1964	DARE-DEVIL #1

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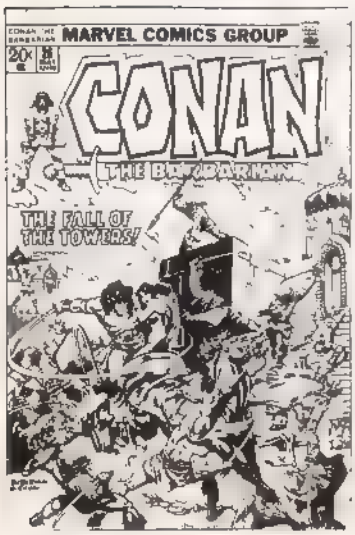
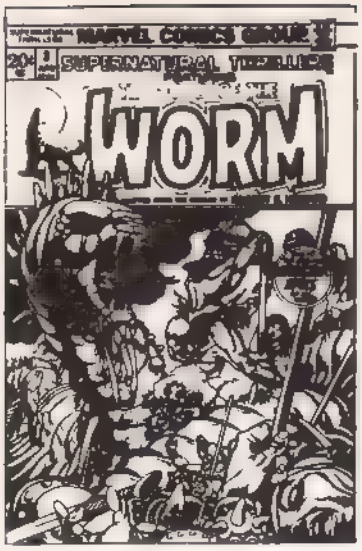
THE COMIC REVIEW

by JAMES VAN HISE

WORLDS UNKNOWN #1 - This is Marvel's attempt at presenting serious straight science fiction, something which has the widely known reputation of not succeeding sales-wise in comics. In order to sell straight SF to the average comics reader, it must be couched in terms which, on the surface, will appeal to him directly and this is exactly what Marvel has done. The cover of this premier issue depicts one of the most horrendous looking monsters imaginable and in the current market it should sell like hotcakes. Of the three stories this issue presents, two are new and one is a reprint. The two new stories are adaptations of professional science fiction stories, the lead being from Frederik Pohl's "The Day After The Day The Martians Came!" from the 1967 original anthology DANGEROUS VISIONS. The adaptation by Gerry Conway is very well done, although noticeably toned down. For instance, the conflict between the motel owner and his black employee is not quite as strong. It's not really subdued, but the edge is dulled somewhat. Also, a religious oriented joke involving an Irish Catholic and a Martian female was omitted entirely as it was rather strong and comics haven't become as liberated about religion as they have about blacks. Although the joke's omission reduces the effect of the story (since that one joke showed the real ugliness and the intensity the prejudice had taken, the other jokes being rather tame at best) it is still a very admirable attempt at doing straight SF. The art on this strip by Ralph Reese is some of the finest he's done. It is very smooth and polished, some of the faces looking much like photo swipes. The splash page of this story follows the lead of the cover in the "get the buyer hooked" angle as it again shows the Martian in all its loathsome glory. The second story is a 1950's Atlas reprint drawn by Angelo Torres. The plot is an interesting little fantasy but the strip is more noteworthy for the fine Torres art with its nice Frazetta swipes. I was very heartened to see this story as Atlas has a lot of material such as this by Williamson, Torres, Crandall and Wolverton and only about three examples of it have appeared, all the other Atlas reprints chosen being ineffable junk. The final story is a twelve page adaptation of Edmond Hamilton's old story "He That Hath Wings!" drawn by Gil Kane. Although the Kane isn't his best, it is good and fits the story well. The tale itself of the boy born with wings is finely handled and is extremely enjoyable to read, the ending being especially beautiful. This SF companion magazine to SUPERNATURAL THRILLERS has the potential, some of which is already being realized, of far surpassing ST as there have been more far reaching things done in SF and this is what the title will be working up to. As a first issue, WORLDS UNKNOWN is more than successful, and in adapting serious SF it is an admirable effort. It's really refreshing to see Marvel doing something different for a change.



CONAN #26 - Hard times have befallen our stalwart. I was pretty disenchanted with his handling (artwise) under Barry Smith but this is really too much. When I heard that Buscema was taking over I had visions of fine things as Tom Palmer was supposedly going to be his inker. But without Palmer, the art has suffered rather badly. Although this issue isn't as bad as the barren art on #25, it isn't too much better. Even in the spots where the art is fairly detailed, it still doesn't capture the feel it should for this type of story. This is supposed to be sword and sorcery but the drawing has too much of the super-hero syndrome in it so that I expect Thor or the F.F. to burst through the woodwork. Plus, and even more crucial, is that Buscema's version of Conan looks so different from Smith's. This is not just in facial features bit in Conan having a much larger torso a la the Frazetta version. It was all too abrupt. The story itself is good, but so far Buscema has just not shown that he can handle this type of strip that well. Steranko once said that Marvel should start over completely on Conan. I may not totally agree with that, but I think that they should begin anew on the art. It's just that so far they've kept on blowing it!



SUPERNATURAL THRILLERS #3 - This is easily one of Marvel's best titles. The reason for this is that all they have to do to make it good is choose a fine horror tale and adapt it without screwing it up. They did pretty good jobs in their first two issues but this is by far their most impressive one. The art by Gil Kane is some of the finest he's done, not quite matching his pinnicle BLACKMARK, but it does approach it. The inking by Ernie Chua is quite good and fits Kane's art much better than other inkers that Marvel has tried to match with him. The adaptation is pretty faithful and retains the Howard feel as well as most of the finer points of the plot. The only real differences lie in the way the Worm is portrayed and the sequential order of the battered body of the furry piper being smashed against the wall. Also, the monster's death throes are abreviated somewhat. The biggest difference though is the way the worm is interpreted. The actual story by Howard describes it as being white (a far cry from green, no matter how you look at it) with a long proboscis (a tubular sucking mouth). In other words, it looked much like a monstrous worm, not a lizard-snake of the comic version. Actually though, Marvel's version is more effective for the illustrated format and is extremely well done for that. I was glad to see Marvel adapt this story as Howard originally wrote it, rather than turning it into another Conan story or into a Kull story as in the case of "Wolfshead". What helps make this story more unique than the average sword and sorcery story is the touch of James Allison, a modern man who is dying and who remembers his previous incarnations, that of Niord being one of them. It's difficult to pinpoint where this concept originated but one can reasonably assume that Howard got the idea from Edgar Rice Burroughs' story "The Moon Maid". It is a real coup on Marvel's part to do this story in this fashion for right from the cover through the headlong rush of the adaptation, it's a truly memorable experience.

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #4 - This issue contains another in Marvel's irregular series of adaptations of stories by H.P. Lovecraft. I'm sorry to say that they are keeping true to the form established by their previous adaptations in that they have done another sunstandard job of adapting an excellent horror story. Their first mistake was in choosing Gene Colon for the artist for although he is very good on TOMB OF DRACULA, he needs an inker of the calibre of Tom Palmer to bring out the best and most atmospheric aspects of his style. Someone like Ralph Reese would have done a better job on this story, although even his art would have suffered from the mediocre adaptation. The plot comes across in a very sterile manner, capturing nothing of the actual story. To give you a small example of what's missing, I'll quote the final line of the actual story as it was written by Lovecraft: "I see it--coming here--hell-wind--titan blur--black wings--Yog Sothoth save me--the three-lobed burning eye..." Find anything like that in Marvel's version? In fact, their version of the final scene is so aborted as to be almost non-existant! The fanzine "HPL" had a tremendously powerful rendition of this final scene of the Haunter flying through the crackling night sky toward the doomed Robert Blake, but the best Marvel could come up with was a wispy shadow exiting from the church steeple. What a rotten mess they made! The underground comics SKULL #4 & #5 adapted Lovecraft stories in both issues and did fine jobs, so there's no excuse for Marvel not doing the same, as Lovecraft's stories contain little or nothing that the code would object to, and yet they persist in draining his stories of all key elements of atmosphere and power. It's beyond me why. The remaining stories in this issue of J.I.M. were good, but in many ways reminiscent of their Atlas days in that they were rather undistinguished. This title has dropped much from what were very good first and second issues.

DRACULA LIVES #1 - Despite the failure of SAVAGE TALES, Marvel is once more entering the black and white horror magazine market. DRACULA LIVES is their initial book of three which will be published over three consecutive months. Although I feel that in many ways they did a good job on this, the bad points of this book tend to stand out rather glaringly. For instance, the photos bursting with absurd dialogue which introduce each story are totally unnecessary and rediculous. The four reprints they chose continue their tradition of letting a blind man choose which stories to use as they are incredibly bad. The black and white format would have been the perfect place to reprint some of the old Basil Wolverton and Al Williamson stories which Marvel has all but ignored in their reprint series. Thankfully, the new material outweighs the stench of the reprints. The cover by Boris is very nice and does a good job of setting off the issue with a high quality mood piece. There was good judgment used in deciding the types of stories the three Dracula pieces would be as they have

(Continued at end of letter column)

FACE FRONT!

We want to hear from you. This is your magazine. This is not an empty statement, we mean it. We want to hear your comment and opinions (pro and con) not only on MARVEL TIMES but on any aspect of Marvel comics. Send your letters to: MARVEL TIMES, "Face Front", 9875 SW 212 Street, Miami, Florida 33157

Dear Editor:

I received MARVEL TIMES #2 the other day and felt that I should make some comments.

First, regarding price and page count. Both issues cost 75¢, but #1 was 20 pages while #2 is 24 pages. It appears that the page count has gone up, which I assume was accomplished by using a lighter weight stock for the cover. But #1 has only a one page ad, while #2 has 5½ pages of ads. The difference is 4½ pages, while the increase in pages was only four. This there is actually one-half page less this issue than last. If you were able to add four pages, you could have filled them not with ads that most readers will see anyway in the RBCC, but with more articles or expanded versions of ones that did appear. I'm sure that this can be corrected for #3.

Jim Van Hise's "Dr. Strange" was adequate, but could have been improved by more personal comments concerning the character of Dr. Strange, instead of more or less listing issue credits. My two favorite Marvel characters are Spider-Man and Doctor Strange, both coincidentaly drawn (and plotted) by Steve Ditko originally. And those are the characters that I remember, Ditko's. Though I did think Colan's Strange was excellent, I still prefer Ditko's. Though Dr. Strange was and is a secondary character, I always knew that not one of the other Marvel characters could match him in powers, except maybe for Thor and I doubt that. Dr. Strange had a charisma under Ditko (revived temporarily by Colan) that was matched at Marvel only by Spiderman. I feel sorry for Paul Rew for thinking that a character is always interesting no matter who does him. I cannot stomach Donald Duck by anyone other than Carl Barks, Magnus by anyone other than Russ Manning, and Spider-Man by anyone other than Ditko. Usually a character (if you're lucky) is handled well once, then forget it. There are, of course, exceptions. Dr. Strange was one; Tarzan is an exceptional one. But Dr. Strange handled well is potentially Marvel's best character. Unfortunately, there is no adequate writing talent at Marvel nowadays who can do him justice.

"The Age of Kirby" was a waste of a page, as was Mark Burbey's favorite passion "Berni Wrightson at Marvel". Hell, you could have just listed them Mark. It sure would have saved space. If there's no point of going into the storyline of "Skull of Silence", why go into "Gargoyle Every Night"? Who cares about a complete rundown to the minutest detail of the story? You're supposedly writing about Wrightson. Stick to your subject. That's one thing that I had to learn to do in "The Williamson Collector". You are writing about an artist's work. Well then, analyze it, criticize it; the story is secondary to the point of the article. A superficial synopsis is all you need.

Expand "The Comic Review"!

Gary Brown's "Wither Thou Goest, Stan Lee?" was alright. It almost sounds like a eulogy. Maybe Stan Lee is dead and Howard Hughes is impersonating him. But then, we'll never know. "Kull, Marvel's Best" should have gone into the writing aspect a little deeper; otherwise it was fine. What could be wrong about "The Watcher Speaks"?

"Scenes We'd Like To See" could have been a lot better. My major complaint with it is Andy's poor art. He can do a lot better than that.

Now to the letters column. It appears that I have started the first controversy in MT. So, I feel I should rebut the rebuttal to my article. Taking the prime objectors as they came, Roger Connor states that I screwed up the chronology. That I did, and I plead guilty. I sold my Marvel set over a year and a half ago, so I did not have the books in question available whenever I wanted them. But I had seen them recently, so art criticism of them was not done from memory. Roger's inane comment that Marvel twisted Smith into a Kirby-Steranko imitator at first is simply absurd. There was no noticeable differences in the Daredevil's done by Smith. I doubt that Marvel's claim that Smith combined the best of Kirby's and Steranko's styles was commercial, albeit rediculous. I sure as hell do notice Kirby-Steranko traits in Smith's current work. You later imply that that "plastic padding" of Smith's in CONAN

#15 that I referred to was reminiscent of Steranko. Obviously, you think that Smith resembles Steranko too, although you may not know it. Your statement that "his present stuff is the real Barry Smith" is rediculous. If Smith's older stuff was molded by Marvel into an imitation of Kirby & Steranko, then there must have been a point where Smith chucked that style and started drawing in his true style. If that was the case, there must exist an extreme break in styles. Well, where is it? I must have missed it. Contradictions in your appreciations run rampant. You disavow Smith's early art as "rather poor" and Kirby-Steranko inspired, but then you hail SHIELD #12 as being a masterpiece (my adjective). It's a piece of crap! I can understand one's appreciation of Smith's current work, even though I don't share that great an appreciation, but no one with any critical ability could think SHIELD #12 has any redeeming features. About inkers: Colletta is not a Wood when it comes to inking. Every instance I've ever seen of Colletta's inking showed that all he did was ink; he didn't complement the pencils. TOWER OF SHADOWS #7 is Smith's work. My comment about the character's features was a compliment to Smith's ability. You change it into an attack. How do you know that Smith's current inkers aren't what really makes you like Conan? Maybe they make Smith's pencils look good. About Smith's detail and anatomy: there is such a thing as superflousness in anything. With Smith it's detail. Alex Toth is the prime exponent of fundamental story telling. Extreme detail is for book illustration, not comic book illustration. In comics the artist is trying to tell a story through a series of pictures. Superfluous detail bogs down the story. One can convey an atmosphere without extremes, but it's easier to do it with them. That's what Smith does; he compensates for his inability to tell a story by substituting unneeded tidbits. From this point on, you start comparing Smith's idiosyncracies with other artists. Well Roger, all I can say to that is two wrongs don't make a right. In the instance of Kane, Kane knows anatomy. He drew straight anatomy in the fifties and early sixties. But he then became impressionistic. You can't exaggerate something unless you know the basics first. You can't <u>teach</u> someone to paint abstractly or impressionistically. That's absurd. You have to know anatomy to exaggerate it. Kane's basic anatomy even today is correct; Smith's never was or is. Steranko <u>was</u> extreme in his pyrotechnics at times. I don't exude my bodily juices enthusiastically and uncritically over anyone. No one is sacred; believe it or not, Barry Smith isn't.

Now to Paul Rew. I've already mentioned my factual errors, so I'll comment on Paul's statement that "To find awkward anatomy and strange faces disturbing means that, literally, all the comic book artists that ever worked come under Mr. Bigman's censure." That's ridiculous. What I was saying was that Smith's art is not suited for his subject matter. Smith is trying to be a realistic artist a la Frazetta or Williamson. In that respect he fails because of his atrocious anatomy. But then you say "What about artists like Jack Davis?" Yes, what about him? Davis is <u>not</u> trying to be realistic. He imbues his stories with a frenetic, insane comedy. His people (when in normal perspective) are proportioned though. The style is not realistic, but the anatomy is correct. Kirby is probably the only major artist who has not drawn with correct anatomy but his stories are certainly not in a realistic vein. By distortion Kirby assails your senses; he provides the well-known "sense of wonder". This is why Kirby is popular. My personal preferences tend toward neo-realistic artists such as Frazetta, Williamson and Crandall. Because of this, I find Kirby's current work unpalatable. Where once distortion and exaggeration were used for a purpose, Kirby tends toward sloppiness nowadays. Of course, Royer is not Kirby's best inker. Royer, like Colletta, does not complement Kirby; by inking Kirby's pencils, all Royer does is make them able to be photographed by cameras for printing.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that neither Roger nor Paul made any mention of my appreciation of Smith's work, despite it being limited. Very few artists are completely without worth; Smith is <u>not</u>, I repeat <u>not</u>, one of them. Reread my article. I stated my objections and the areas in which I think Smith needs to improve. In the last paragraph, I said: "Barry Smith needs to work on one thing:anatomy. If he masters that, he is capable of doing superb comic book art". I, Larry Bigman, said that. Don't be so positive in your defenses. As I have said, there are no sacred cows. I don't think Barry Smith will suffer from my article. I'm sure he will never see it on his own. So why are you two so fanatical? You make me wonder. Perhaps this sort of unreasoned behavior is what has given the devout Marvel fanatic such a sorry name in fandom. I guess it's your turn now, both of you, to rebut my rebuttal to your rebuttal to my article.

Larry Bigman
2919-96 S.W. 13th Street
Gainesville, Florida 32601

Dear Editor:

It is always gratifying to read ones name in print. As I read my letter I could only wonder that vocal support could have been so poor that you were forced to print it. Still, I may be overcompensating for my lack of self-criticism. MARVEL TIMES #2 read just like #1. I enjoyed it without feeling stimulated by it, you know? The reason such efforts as SPA FON, etc. are so good, I think, is that the editor and contributors are enthusiastic about what they are doing. I can't honestly say that I detect the same enthusiasm in the MARVEL TIMES. The Doctor Strange item was good. A solid piece of writing if ever I saw one. But of the rest, two were poor and two were garbage. What on earth motivated you to print that Kirby article? I don't object to the writing so much as the choice of topic. Why spend a page rehashing what has been done to death ever since Kirby rose from the dead at D.C. Besides, to do him justice would take a whole vol. of the'TIMES'. Then there was the Wrightson thing. Berni Wrightson is a great artist and Marvel should have spared no effort to get him one of their fantasy books but a discussion of Berni belongs in any other book than the MARVEL TIMES. He is a D.C. personality at the very least. That article on Stan Lee recognised a serious fault in present fan articles. Namely that the artist gets all the attention. However, it didn't do the subject justice. Not the writer's fault I think because it simply required research that is unable to be done short of talking to Stan Lee and his confederates. It might be food for thought, the ida of devoting whole issues of the 'TIMES' to certain Marvel personalities. It might not be practical but I get ideas so seldom I can't bear to waste them. I have now reached the article that prompted me to write again, "KULL, MARVEL'S BEST". It was comprehensive, tho the amount of Kull material that has been done is not numerous enough to tax anyone's memory. However, the curious propensity of the M.T. to dislike Barry Smith clouded what might have been a justifiable thesis. Not only that but no effort was made to contrast any other books than Kull & Conan. I was left wondering if the author had forgotten about WARLOCK, HERO FOR HIRE, MONSTER OF FRANKENSTEIN, or any personal favorite that a 'true-believer' might care to insert. If that was not the purpose then the title was either deliberately inflamatory (like so many of Marvel's cover blurbs the RBCC deplores) or ill chosen. I also have to say that a distaste for an artist who is obviously pretty good is a poor foundation for critical evaluations. It is undeniable that Smith is a good artist even if you may not care for his work. If one is to juxtapose KULL and CONAN then it is best to ask what is it about these two books that makes them so different even though they are cut from the same cloth. It seems that these two books differ in atmosphere and view point the most. Conan is a wanderer and thief and Smith seems to close in on Conan. The Conan book is forever focusing on the immediate and most violent aspects of Conan's violent life. Kull is a king and the Severins seem to be involved not so much in Kull's violence as Kull's world and people. The decision as to which is better is a matter of taste. However, like the characters I find that the books have very different energy levels. CONAN is a lusty and violent book with a very amoral tone to it while KULL is a constrained and thoughtful book--like Kull the king (conqueror) is. I can think of nothing else to say so I will say bye.

Paul Rew
Rt. 1 Box 195-a
Zephyrhills, Fla. 33599

DEAR EDITOR:

This kind of Marvel fanzine is just what I've been looking for, and so I hope you can spare some time to listen to my comments on #2.

First off, the cover was very good, with some of Severin's best work, I thought. Then you followed up with a fantastic history of Dr. Strange. In my opinion, this was the high point of the issue. The article itself was great, but the reprinted panels and cover from DR. STRANGE issues made it magnificent. Mr. Van Hise is a great critic of art (I CAN THINK OF A FEW PEOPLE WHO MIGHT DISAGREE WITH YOU ON THAT - JVH) and I hope he continues all of his superb writing for M.T.

"The Age Of Kirby" was good, but should've been a bit longer instead of just a summery of Kirby's history. This was a good idea, though, and you should continue that kind of thing, telling about different Marvel artists, writers, editors, etc.

"Berni Wrightson at Marvel" was good, although I think everyone agrees that it's too bad Mark Burbey did not have more to write about on that subject.

"The Comic Review" should definitely stay as a regular feature, although it would be nice for Mr. Van Hise to lengthen it to maybe a page. Gary Brown's article on Stan Lee was nice and informative for those who don't know much about Stan's

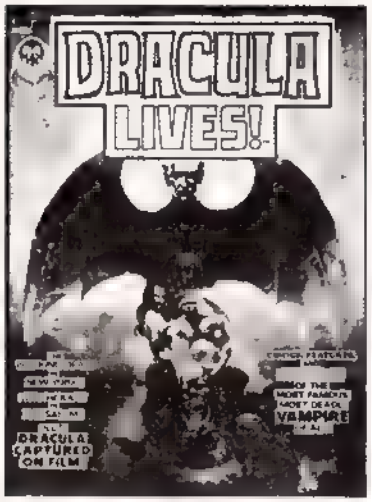
earlier doings in comics (of which I'm one).

"Kull, Marvel's Best" was really a well done article, sort of the kind you expect to see in this kind of mag. I'm hoping there are more articles such as this to come, by avid fans of different comic characters.

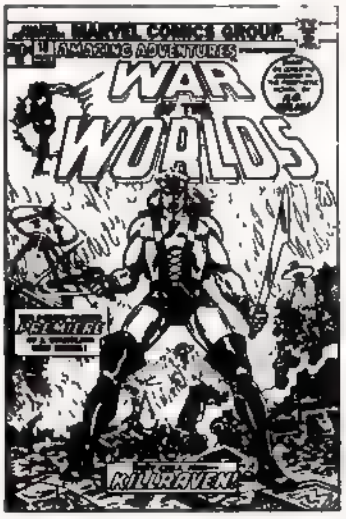
You should also keep "The Watcher Speaks" (which is probably intended as a permanent feature anyway). I find this to be very interesting in general and can become one of the most informative features in your mag. My congrats to Orlando Falcon on a great column! In closing, I would like to say I hope you use more artwork in the future, although the cover and panel reprints from comics are good, if you don't use too many. The classified ads should be a good addition. My thanks for sending me this great issue, and I'll be waiting for more great ones to come!!

Rod Snyder
3600 Ripple Creek
Austin, Texas 78746

THE COMIC REVIEW (Continued).



not just extended the plots in the comic, rather they have provided new areas in which the Dracula character can be exercised. The touch in the first story of Dracula having an adverse reaction to the blood of a drug addict was very good as it was an excellent example of the revived Count confronting the 1970's head on. This is something which is not easy to do and still make it appear fresh as the vampire theme has been extremely overworked in virtually every medium. The story of Dracula seeking a cure is not a new idea but still it was interestingly handled and, like all the new stories, it was very well drawn. My favorite of these three tales though was the one of Dracula in his original period. Besides being finely drawn, it captured the feel of the era well, creating a gothic atmosphere seldom achieved outside of Hammer films. All in all this is a very good magazine, despite its unfortunate weak points, and even if those weaknesses are not corrected, it will still remain worthwhile so long as the new stories retain the high quality achieved in this premiere issue.



AMAZING ADVENTURES #18 - This newest addition to Marvel's stable is already shaping into one of their best. I like the concept very much as it is a good extension of H.G. Wells original science fiction concept. Not sword and sorcery, not the heroic fantasy of Edgar Rice Burroughs but science fiction. This is the second of Marvel's attempts at a successful science fiction series, the first being their more serious WORLDS UNKNOWN. Using the idea of the second, and successful, coming of the Martians is a good one and to me makes for a very exciting series. The charcater of Killraven is handled well and although his personality doesn't yet have the greatest amount of depth presented to us (background is not personality), he is still an interesting individual. The premier story is well written, providing interesting and thought provoking reading as well as swiftly paced action. The art by Neal Adams is some of the best he's done, and even though he only does the first half of the story, the remaining part done by Chaykin pretty much retains the quality of the Adams section, surprisingly so in fact. My only complaints with the strip would be Killraven's costume which looks like it it was thrown together at the last minute, having a rather slap-dash appearance. My one other complaint is the cover. It's not that I feel the cover is bad in concept or layout, just in execution (which is the best word I can think of to describe the sloppiness of Romita's art). This strip holds far more potential and interest than Guliver Jones did with its rather stale air and "seen it all before" look. I see no reason that this book shouldn't succeed and I look forward to coming issues although I wish that Neal Adams would have been able to continue it.

CLASSIFIED AD

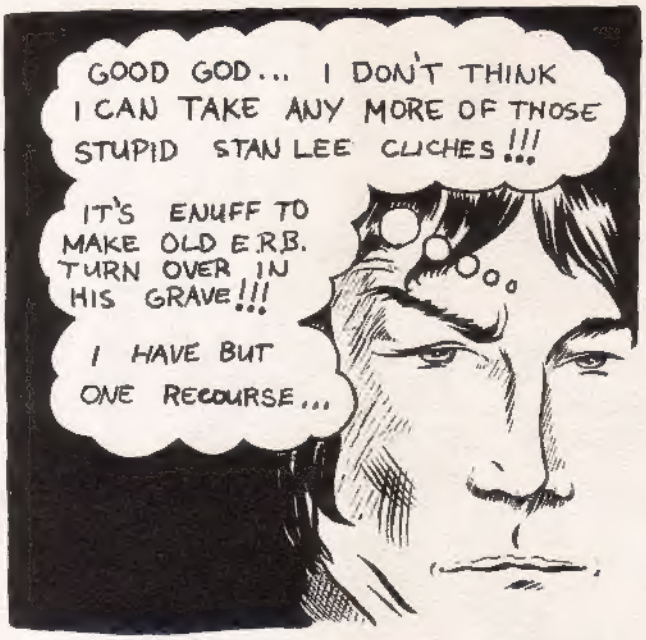
COMICS FOR SALE: We're selling comics, magazines, books, posters, cards, etcs. Send 10¢ for huge list to: Richard Roder, Stissing Mtn. Rd., Pine Plains, N.Y. 12567

WANTED Attention to all progressing artists. We badly want amateur artwork from all Marvel fans. Any size will do - send in any size or shape drawing by you of any superhero (don't color it). Comics will be given to the ten best artists. Nothing to lose! Lots to win! Richard Roder, Stissing Mtn. Rd., Pine Plains, N.Y. 12567

TARZAN Meets KAZAR

(YEP, KIDDIES! YOU GUESSED IT! THIS IS MORE "SCENES WE'D LIKE TO SEE FROM MARVEL!")

TARZAN VISITS THE HIDDEN LAND...
HOLD IT BLONDIE, IS THIS PELLUCIDAR?
IT WAS "PELLUCIDAR", NOW IT'S "THE HIDDEN LAND!"
AND I'M KAZAR, HEAD HONCHO HERE, CURLY!
YAWN


GOOD GOD... I DON'T THINK I CAN TAKE ANY MORE OF THOSE STUPID STAN LEE CLICHES!!!
IT'S ENUFF TO MAKE OLD E.R.B. TURN OVER IN HIS GRAVE!!!
I HAVE BUT ONE RECOURSE...